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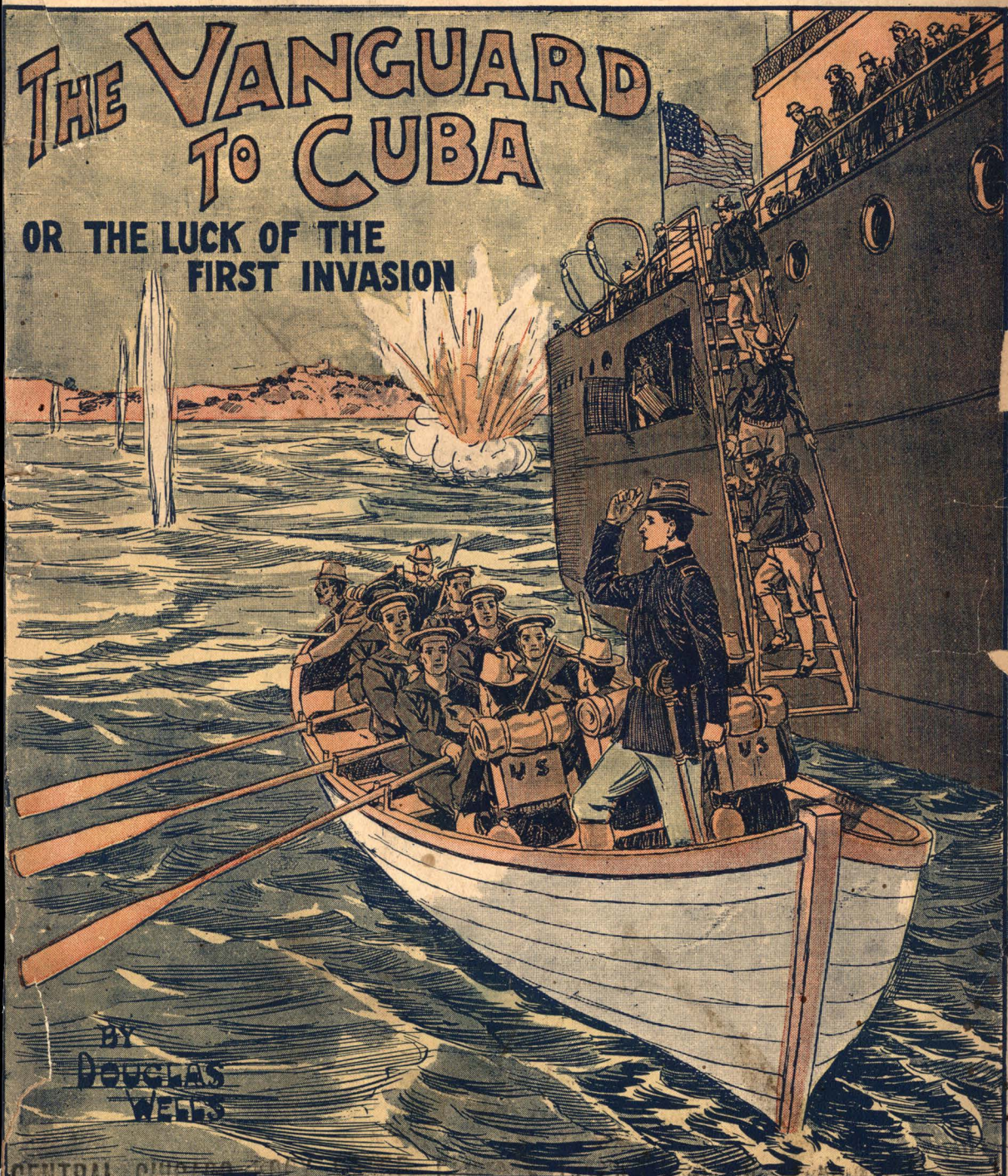
THRILLING STORIES
...OF...
OUR VICTORIOUS ARMY

FLAG WEEKLY

STREET & SMITH,
PUBLISHERS

THE VANGUARD TO CUBA

OR THE LUCK OF THE
FIRST INVASION



BY
DOUGLAS WELLS

CENTRAL CHICAGO BOOK STORE, 45 S. HALSTED ST., CHICAGO, ILL.
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Starry Flag Weekly

Issued Weekly.—By Subscription, \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, STREET & SMITH, 81 Fulton St., N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1898, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.

No. 12.

NEW YORK, July 23, 1898.

Price Five Cents.

The Van Guard to Cuba OR, THE LUCK OF THE FIRST INVASION.

By DOUGLAS WELLS.

CHAPTER I.

HAL'S GREAT NEWS FROM WASHINGTON.

"I wish we were off."

"Suspense is worse than bullets."

"Are we really going, anyway?"

The speakers were three young volunteer officers, lounging in an atmosphere of smoke in the office parlor of the Tampa Bay Hotel.

The time was a little after 1 A. M., on the eighth of June.

The Fifth Army Corps was almost entirely aboard of the big fleet of transports over at Port Tampa, seven miles distant.

At the headquarters in the big hotel in Tampa, it was known that the expedition would start some time before the close of the day just ushered in.

But here was the staff, and a great number of other people who were going on the expedition still hopelessly waiting at the hotel.

There was but a single railroad leading from Tampa down to the port; it was, at that, only a single track road.

All afternoon and night this road had

been congested with train after train bearing troops.

One man who had arrived in the course of the evening had brought back word that it took him five hours to get down to Port Tampa; two hours to get back again to Tampa.

The confusion was growing, instead of lessening.

General Shafter, commanding this embarking army, had spoken to the railroad people for a train to take himself and other generals, and their staffs, down to the port.

The train had been promised for various hours during the night.

The latest was that the train would leave the hotel grounds at 2 A.M. This had been promised so positively that the waiting scores brightened up. They would yet get aboard the transports, sink into their berths, and get a few hours' sleep by the time that the great fleet was out on the deep.

It was a picturesque sight, even if not exactly a stirring one.

Army officers, in old, worn, campaign

NICK CARTER'S DISGUISES ARE WONDERFUL.

uniforms, lounged about on the chairs and divans, each with his sword strapped to his side and with an enormous revolver in holster secured to a belt full of cartridges.

Wives, sisters, sweethearts of officers were there in great numbers, with melancholy faces and red eyes, sitting or pacing the floor with dear ones, many of whom were destined never to return from Cuba's shores.

Great piles of tentage and luggage littered the spacious room. Hotel porters were busily engaged in transferring this to the yard outside.

"The train is going at two o'clock," was the word that went from mouth to mouth.

Those of the officers who had women folks with them stole to dark corners on the hotel veranda, there to exchange more earnest last embraces, those who were going trying to find new words of cheer to whisper to those who must stay behind.

It was a sad scene, a stern and grim one.

Two young officers stood apart, looking calm and composed.

"It is almost pleasanter to have no dear ones to leave behind," suggested Lieutenant Hal Maynard to his chum.

"I am thinking in still another vein," replied Captain Juan Ramirez. "I have a sweetheart in Cuba whom I hope very soon to see. Hence, for my own part, every move toward the start fills me with more joy. But I am sorry for all of these heartbreaks which must take place around us merely because the Spaniards have proved dastards."

Second Lieutenant Maynard was a cavalry officer, attached to General Shafter's staff. He was just back from Havana, where he had secured plans of all the fortifications, and much information regard-

ing General Blanco's plans of defense.

He had been in Cuba once before that, since the declaration of war, on an important mission to Gomez.

Before war was declared, and before our hero had entered the regular army, he had served with the Cubans in the field. He and Juan had been chums in the "long grass" of Cuba.

Ramirez had been sent over by Gomez to accompany the American army and supply such information as he could to the American commander when the latter should stand on Cuban soil.

"Do you notice who the most impatient men are here?" asked Juan.

"Who, in particular?"

"The newspaper correspondents."

"They are likely to get over that impatience, once they have been in field, under fire, and helpless to fire back at the enemy," smiled Hal.

"You think they will flinch?" asked Juan, opening his eyes.

"I did not say that, my dear fellow."

"It is the newspaper correspondents who are most responsible for this war to free Cuba," declared Juan, warmly. "For my part, I am grateful to them. I look upon them as heroes. There are many here who have defied Weyler and Blanco in order to send the truth out of Havana. There are men in that group over yonder who have fought with the Cubans, who have brought messages through to this country that have been of the greatest service to the insurgents. There are men there who know what the yellow fever is; there are men there who have lain in Spanish dungeons, expecting from day to day to be shot on account of their efforts to tell American readers what was passing in Cuba. Some of them knew comrades—fellow-correspondents—who lie now in their graves in Cuba."

Juan was deeply in earnest.

"THE UNSEEN EYE" HAS A GIRL DETECTIVE.

Like the rest of the Cubans, he was grateful to America for interfering against the Spaniard; his gratitude extended to every man in the country who had had any hand in bringing about that interference.

"There are fellows in the regular army who don't thank the correspondents quite as hard," answered Hal. "They are ready to fight, for that is their trade, but they do not like the added touch of yellow fever and other deadly ills that are in prospect. Now, if the war could be put off until fall——"

"There would then be no Cubans left to fight for," said Juan, mournfully.

"True, old chap, and it is also true that when humanity calls for a fight, to-day is the time to fight. But it is after two o'clock, and we do not yet hear anything about the train starting."

Inquiry showed that the train would not start right away. It was still impossible to move another train into the crowded system.

Then men became cross. They must sit and wait, heavy-eyed and hungry. Tobacco, smoked freely over empty stomachs, produced irritation of nerves.

So the time dragged by. It was nearly 4.30 when the word finally rang through the hotel's office parlor that the train was ready.

General officers and staff officers flocked aboard the train. Newspaper correspondents were there, too, in abundance, for the American army, fighting for the most progressive people in the world, does not go into the field without its chroniclers.

At last the start was made, the train reaching the port some time after six o'clock.

At once a break was made for the only two eating places at the port.

Hundreds of officers who had come down with their regiments the night be-

fore were also besieging these eating-places.

For hours the tables and waiters were overtaxed, hundreds of would-be break-fasters being turned away hungry.

Among the latter number were Hal and Juan. Finding it impossible to get seats at tables, they wisely went aboard the flagship, and there, some hours later, reported to General Shafter when he came aboard.

"Have you seen Mr. Miley?" questioned the general.

"No, general."

"He is looking for you, I believe."

"Shall I report to him, general?"

"If you find him, ask him to report to me, and come with him."

All unsuspecting, our hero started after the general's aide-de-camp.

Amidships he found that tall lieutenant.

"Yes, I've been looking for you," admitted Miley, with one of his quiet smiles. "But come back to the general with me."

"It's only a little matter," announced General Shafter, gravely, when the pair stood before him. Mr. Maynard, the people at Washington believe that it is time to administer a little discipline to you."

"Discipline?" repeated Hal, blankly.

With a preternaturally grave face Lieutenant Miley thrust his hand inside his coat, bringing out a paper which he handed to the general.

"This document tells its own story," said Shafter.

With a good deal of wonderment young Lieutenant Maynard unfolded the paper.

A great rush of emotion came over him all of a sudden. His eyes lighted up with happiness.

He held his commission as first lieutenant of cavalry.

HOW DO YOU LIKE "THE HUMAN FLY?"

"General," he stammered, "I thank you for this great happiness."

"Don't thank me," smiled Shafter. "Thank the President, who made out the commission."

"Certainly, sir, I do. But you also had some hand in the matter. It was at your——"

"At my recommendation? Yes, Mr. Maynard, and I never took greater pleasure in making a recommendation in my army life. This commission is given you not only in recognition of your splendid secret work in Havana, but for all your good work since you have been in the army. We have some hot work cut out for us in Cuba. You will have abundant chance to show that you are entitled to this new commission, and who knows but you will have a chance to earn your captaincy yet? You will continue on my staff. Mr. Miley has some work cut out for you already."

Hal went about his duties with a new, wonderful relish.

All day long transports were pulling out into the bay.

Bands were playing, soldiers cheering, people on shore were waving their handkerchiefs, as transport after transport laden down with men turned its prow gulfward.

All day the excitement kept up. The first expedition was starting to Cuba, on its mission of freeing a people and avenging the tragic memory of the Maine.

But toward night it was observed that the fleet was putting back.

News leaked out that the sailing was postponed. It had been a false start.

Next came the news that two Spanish warships had been seen hovering in the Nicholas Channel, apparently waiting to do its best to sink the helpless ships laden with Uncle Sam's soldiers.

Six days that rumor delayed the start.

Throughout the fleet disappointment was rife.

But there was one in the Fifth Army Corps that night whose happiness outweighed every other consideration.

Hal Maynard, ere he turned in, read his new commission over a dozen times.

There was no more zealous enthusiast in the army than he.

He had received that greatest incentive to good work—appreciation.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONSULTATION WITH GARCIA.

"Hal, Hal! Wake up!"

With the first appearance of dawn on the twentieth of June Captain Juan Ramirez stood over his chum and shook him.

They occupied the same stateroom on General Shafter's flagship, the *Seguranca*.

Hal drowsily opened his eyes, to find Ramirez's orbs blazing with a peculiar light—the light of patriotism.

"See!" cried the young Cuban. "There is Cuba, and our great province of Santiago!"

Through the stateroom window a rugged coast line was visible.

The coast range of foothills appeared unbroken. Here and there in the background towered mountains whose peaks were above the clouds.

Hal, who had never been on this part of Cuba's southern coast sprang out of his bunk and spent some minutes in silently gazing at the grand scene.

"The Cubans have occupied some of those passes since the insurrection started," said Juan. "Spain's soldiers could never dislodge us from there."

"I don't wonder at it," assented Hal, glowing with a military enthusiast's realization of the defensive possibilities of

those mountains. "But how far are we from Santiago?"

"Say forty miles."

"And going about seven knots an hour," mused Hal, looking at the water. "We shall reach there, then, about ten o'clock."

"It will be a great sight to see these splendid American soldiers debarking," suggested Juan.

"A sight that will probably be reserved for to-morrow," hinted Hal.

"So?" exclaimed the Cuban, disappointedly. "Do you say that we don't go on shore to-day?"

"I don't believe we do."

Juan looked searchingly at his chum.

"I understand," smiled Hal. "You think I am keeping something back from you. But I am not. Though I am a staff officer, I assure you that I have heard nothing as to the landing."

The morning was beautiful, though tropical heat prevailed in full force.

Hal, as soon as he was dressed, joined Ramirez in slowly promenading the quarterdeck.

The great fleet of fifty vessels was spread out over a line at least twenty miles in length.

Going only at cruising speed, they drifted lazily through the water in a way that gave no suggestion of the vigorous, deadly business on which they had come.

Decks and rigging of the various transports were crowded with soldiers eagerly taking their first glimpse of Cuba, and speculating on their own chances in the first battle.

Now, for the first time, those who had heard of the great heat in Cuban waters knew what it meant.

Even at sea with some breeze blowing the thermometer stood at more than 110 on the decks of the vessels.

Thinking of what the same heat on

shore with less breeze and aggravated by the exertions of marching and fighting would mean the men compressed their lips grimly.

"Only salamanders could stand it," declared some of the soldiers.

As the morning progressed and the vessels got closer to Santiago the heat increased.

Hal and Juan were about the only two on board of the huge flagship who were thoroughly happy. They were used to the climate of Cuba. Heat had no terrors for them.

Our hero's guess regarding the time of arrival proved very nearly correct. It was just about ten o'clock when the transports began to slow up at the rendezvous some ten or twelve miles off the entrance to the harbor of Santiago.

From inshore two or three tugs started seaward under full heads of steam.

Astern each flew the Stars and Stripes. At the bow of each boat was a pennant.

"Torpedo boats?" queried Juan, while Hal looked long and steadily through his glass.

"Pen and ink torpedoes," laughed Hal. "Those are the press dispatch boats that have been with the navy all along."

The foremost boat of all was soon alongside, with an energetic-looking young American standing in the bow.

"Flagship ahoy!" he shouted.

In an instant the rail was lined with eager officers. "How are the Spaniards on shore?" called several.

"Happy as clams," came the reporter's answer. "Waiting to give you the fight of your lives!"

"Fight? Bosh!" came the derisive answer. "We've got eighteen thousand real fighting men on this fleet."

"And how many Spaniards do you think there are in Santiago?" asked the reporter.

"About eight thousand?" asked Hal.

"Forty-five thousand, and they're behind fortifications."

At this announcement there were many long faces for a few moments.

"Bosh!" jeered Hal.

"Bah!" added Juan.

"Seems to be a pretty straight fact about the forty-five thousand," answered the reporter, seriously. "The Cuban general, Calixto Garcia, brought that word out to Sampson when they had a pow-wow yesterday."

"Did Garcia say there were forty-five thousand Spanish soldiers in Santiago?" demanded Hal.

"He said that was the news brought out by a Cuban who escaped from the city."

"That's very different," broke in Juan, quickly. "I can quite understand how the word got out. Some poor devil of a Cuban, known to be loyal to our cause, was caught in Santiago with his family. The Spanish officers held the family as hostages, and let the Cuban go with orders to tell Garcia that there were forty-five thousand soldiers in the forts. The Cuban had to take that report, or know that his family would be butchered in cold blood."

But a bad rumor, once started, travels fast. Though there were many who discounted the forty-five thousand, the impression became general that the Spaniards were gathered in much greater force than had been believed.

Another boat was descried approaching. This flew the navy colors.

"Now we shall have the truth," predicted Hal.

The navy dispatch boat came alongside bearing an officer who boarded the Seguranca.

He was shown at once into General

Shafter's room. There he remained for more than a half an hour.

Meanwhile the officers outside vainly wondered what the news was.

Some of them called across to the younger officers aboard the dispatch boat, but these were ignorant of the real news, or pretended to be.

Juan began to pace the deck like a caged tiger.

On either side of the entrance to the harbor stretched miles and miles of beach where troops could be quickly and easily landed.

Why was everything going so slowly?

"The Spaniards will be laughing at us," gnashed Ramirez. "They will be saying that, now we have sailed down here, we are going to sail away again."

"They'll change their tune soon enough, I fancy," smiled Hal.

"You are able to keep cool, mi amigo? It is wonderful!"

"General Shafter knows what he is doing," spoke Hal, quietly. "You would like to see Spain's soldiers killed by the hundreds?"

"Would I not?" cried Juan, his face glowing darkly.

"Be patient. You will see it. And you will see more. You will see that the city will be taken with a very small loss of American life. It is to bring that about most successfully that we are waiting."

"General Shafter's compliments. Lieutenant Maynard is ordered to report."

So spoke an orderly who had approached unobserved.

Turning, Hal saw General Shafter standing in the doorway of his room.

As our hero started briskly along the deck, Shafter made a signal.

"You are evidently wanted, too, Juan," said Hal, turning back to his comrade.

Both approached the general, saluting.

WHERE OTHERS FAIL, NICK CARTER SUCCEEDS.

"Step inside," directed the general, leading the way.

He seated himself, the young men remaining on their feet. The naval officer was still there.

"You are all guessing what the news is, I suppose," asked the general, smiling.

"Yes, sir."

"It will be some time, I guess, before any one knows much about it. But I am going to take you with me, Mr. Maynard, and it occurred to me that Captain Ramirez might like to go, too, in an unofficial way."

Both young men bowed, but had too much sense to ask where they were going.

"Bring me word when the boat is alongside," Shafter commanded the orderly who stood at the door.

In a few minutes that word was brought.

"Come," said Shafter, rising.

Three or four other staff officers had been invited. They all followed their commander down the side companion-way and aboard the dispatch boat that lay alongside.

Away over the waters they sped. Gradually the transport fleet astern grew smaller and smaller, but another fleet loomed up ahead.

Formed in a half circle around the entrance to the harbor lay Admiral Sampson's great fleet of warships—the same which for weeks had been keeping Cervera's Spanish fleet penned up in the harbor.

Toward the once handsome cruiser New York, now stripped to fighting trim, and painted a dirty gray, steered the dispatch boat.

Here there were more passengers waiting to join—Admiral Sampson and several of his staff.

Close in to shore, and then along the coast the little craft steamed for a few miles.

Close in, rolling and tossing within a stone's throw of the surf, the dispatch boat lay to.

A small boat was lowered. The general and admiral were first to go ashore. And then came the staff officers.

On shore, not many yards from the water, a thatched shelter had been erected.

Here General Garcia, the Cuban, awaited his visitors.

"A consultation," whispered Hal to his chum. "We shall soon know what is to be done."

CHAPTER III.

UNDER SPAIN'S GUNS.

But in this last conclusion our hero proved to be mistaken.

Only the two generals and the admiral knew what was passing. Their aides remained at a respectful distance, alternately watching the sea and the hilly shore.

"What a bag of game this would be for the Spaniards," muttered one of Hal's comrades on Shafter's staff.

"Yes?" retorted Hal. "Take my glass. Do you see that figure a half a mile away, perched at the top of a tree?"

"Yes; I can just barely make it out."

"He is a Cuban sentinel," went on Hal. "A lookout. From where he is posted he can see whether the Spanish troops start along the only roads by which it is possible for them to leave Santiago. From other indications I notice through the woods, I believe that the Cubans are ambushed on the guard all the way between here and Santiago."

"It is true," broke in one of the young officers who had come with Garcia. "The

NICK CARTER IS THE PRINCE OF ALL.

Cubans are so thoroughly on the watch that Spaniards who attempted to come this far would be massacred on the way. They know enough to keep safely behind their forts over by the city."

At length the conference broke up, but for all the staff officers knew of of what had taken place they might as well have remained on board their ships.

It was not until the dispatch boat was almost up with the New York that General Shafter beckoned our hero to him.

"Maynard, are you ready to volunteer for desperate work?"

"The most desperate work you can name, general."

Shafter frowned slightly, as if he feared this young officer were too carried away by enthusiasm.

"What I am going to offer you, Maynard, is no milk-and-water affair."

"General," replied the young lieutenant, earnestly, "I am liable to be killed during this campaign. If anything that you have in store for me hastens that event, why should I complain?"

"Have you ever been in Santiago?"

"Never."

General Shafter looked perplexed.

"But Juan Ramirez has," went on Maynard. "He knows the city like a guide."

"But there is the trouble, Maynard. He is a Cuban, while the information that I want is so important that I would not feel justified in accepting it from any one but an American officer."

"May I ask, general, if you are thinking of sending any one ashore in Santiago?"

"And suppose that I were thinking of it?" propounded Shafter, bluntly.

"Then, sir, why not send Ramirez and me together? I can carry out your orders; he can show me the way. We are used to working together, general."

"But two spies, together, are in twice as much danger as one would be."

This was true, as our hero knew from his own experience.

"Yet I want you to go, if I send any one," resumed Shafter; "for you, Maynard, have had so many opportunities during this war that you are an expert spy."

"I am ready to go ashore, sir, at an instant's notice."

"And Ramirez?"

"He will be, too. I can always speak for him."

"I will think it over. Come aboard the New York with me. Give Ramirez the same order. The other staff officers will return to the Seguranca."

Twenty minutes later Hal and Juan stood in the admiral's office aboard the New York, the only ones present besides the two commanders.

"These young men are ready, admiral," said Shafter.

"I have plenty of young men of my own who would give a year's pay to get the detail," responded Sampson.

"But none, I guess, who are quite as well fitted for the kind of work we are planning."

"If Maynard can do as well in Santiago," declared Sampson, smiling cordially at our hero, "as he did in Havana, he will please us both better than any American in these waters could do."

"We may say something for you, Captain Ramirez," smiled General Shafter.

"Praise for my friend, general, flatters me," responded Juan, bowing.

"Admiral," continued Shafter, turning to his colleague, "do you not agree with me that these are the young men for our purpose?"

"I must agree to that, general, though I warn you that I shall have many black looks from my own young officers if they

NICK CARTER TELLS YOU JUST HOW A DETECTIVE IS TRAINED.

hear of this prize detail going outside of the navy."

"It is settled, then," responded Shafter. "Young gentlemen, you will listen to your instructions, and remain here until the time comes to carry them out."

The instructions were lengthy, but may be briefly summarized.

Disguised under the uniforms of Spanish naval officers, they were to penetrate the harbor at night in a small boat rowed by six volunteer Cubans disguised as Spanish sailors.

As to the details of passing the Spanish men-of-war in the inner harbor, that was to be left to circumstance and the discretion of the young officers.

Once ashore, they were to learn all possible concerning the defenses, the number of Spanish troops and their condition, as well as all other possible information of military value.

"Your instructions are most general in their character," finished General Shafter. "So much is left to your discretion, gentlemen, that success will reflect all the more credit upon you."

"But remember," added the admiral, "that the man who succeeds meets always with more approval than the man who came near to succeeding."

"On second thought," put in the general, "I think I will take both young men back to the Seguranca with me. We can spend what is left of the afternoon in looking over the maps that we already have of Santiago."

Hal and Juan, therefore, put in a busy afternoon aboard the troop flagship.

As the day waned both began to feel excited.

No more perilous mission than theirs could be imagined. Even Hal's famous Havana quest paled beside this.

But it was not personal dread that in-

fluenced them. It was the fear that their failure might be the cause of sacrificing a great many American lives in the coming battle.

Just before dark General Shafter sent for them.

"The New York has already put in toward the mouth of the harbor with some of the other vessels," he explained. "They are going to open fire on Morro, and some of the other fortifications. We shall have to move close enough to transfer you to the New York in a small boat while the bombardment is going on."

"The bombardment, sir?" Maynard could not help asking.

"Not a serious one. Just something to keep the minds of the Spaniards occupied while we are making our real play."

At that moment a thrill vibrated through the Seguranca. She had left her place in the fleet to steam toward the naval vessels gathering within range of Morro Castle.

The sun was already sinking in the west. Before the Seguranca had covered the few miles that lay between her former position and the naval fleet darkness had come on.

It was just the kind of night that was favorable to such operations as were contemplated.

There was already a haze over the water, which threatened to turn into a fog. Besides, in the west, black clouds were gathering which promised a stormy night.

"If the Spanish sailors have any courage left," mused Shafter, speaking just loud enough for our hero to hear him, "they will try to run out a torpedo craft or two to-night to sink some of our transports. My friend, the admiral, will have much on his mind to-night."

And, indeed, the night of the twentieth of June was an anxious night both for

NICK CARTER HAS SEVERAL BOY ASSISTANTS.

the American soldiers and sailors who lay tossing on the sea outside of Santiago!

Boom! The first American warship had opened fire with a well-planted shot that struck in what was left of Morro.

Boom! From another vessel whizzed another shot.

Morro's patched walls, as seen through the glasses, showed groups of excited Spanish officers scanning the hostile fleet.

Then one of Morro's guns sounded, but the badly aimed projectile struck the water a quarter of a mile astern of the New York.

Then both castle and fleet became enveloped in the smoke of a brisk engagement.

In the thick of it Hal and Juan put off in a small boat, and were rowed to the New York.

Though the cross fire was heavy, not a projectile fell anywhere near the path of the boat containing our young friends.

"And yet the Spaniards think they can fight," muttered Juan, disdainfully, lighting a cigarette and blowing the smoke slowly upward to mingle with that made by battle.

They ran alongside the New York on the side furthest from the enemy's guns.

In the ward-room the two young spies made a quick transformation, coming out on deck again attired as junior lieutenants in Spain's navy.

Waiting for them were six picked Cubans, disguised as sailors.

It was so dark now that even the flashes of the guns failed to throw much illumination down on the waters.

Admiral Sampson met the young men on deck, observing:

"Unless it is much clearer in the outer harbor than it is out here you will hardly have difficulty in going straight through to the wharves. Your boat is ready alongside, now, gentlemen. You had better

order your sailors down into it. I shall provide you with a tow for the first part of your journey."

In a very short time Hal, Juan and their sailors were in the boat and in their places.

A tow line passed astern from the torpedo boat Ericsson was made fast to the boat's bow.

A jerk and they were under way. With so light a tow astern the Ericsson pulled the smaller craft through the water at a speed rather greater than eighteen miles an hour.

Around them the intensest darkness prevailed.

There were no Spanish craft in the outer harbor, but the inner harbor was known to contain Cervera's formidable squadron.

Almost at the entrance of this inner harbor the Ericsson cast off.

Close up under her lee passed the little boat, close enough for her occupants to hear a voice whisper:

"Good luck, boys!"

"Thanks," whispered back Hal as softly.

Gathering in the tiller ropes, he ordered, in a barely audible voice:

"Up oars! Let fall! Give way!"

Straight for the mouth of the inner harbor steered Hal.

They went through the narrows, the darkness and haze favoring them.

"See that?" whispered Juan, pointing suddenly ahead.

"A faint gleam of white, yes. One of the Spanish ships is trying to use its searchlight."

"If we get closer, they will be able to pierce the haze and find us."

"If they do, they'll sink us. Then Blanco will cable to Madrid that he has sunk another Yankee warship."

Both young men smiled cheerfully, but

NICK CARTER IS EVER UP-TO-DATE.

the next instant the smile died from Hal's lips.

The light becoming stronger pierced the haze, showing the outlines of their craft plainly to the Spaniard.

"Going to pull away?" asked Juan.

"There's only one way to pull to escape, and that would be out of the harbor. I'm not going to take that way."

"Then——"

But there was no need for Hal to answer his chum's question, for now the boat, passing through the haze, so deceptive as to distances, was close up under the guns of one of Spain's mightiest craft.

Even Juan's heart seemed to come up into his throat.

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE SPANISH FLEET.

A hail came from the deck of the Spaniard, but at the same instant Maynard, rising in the stern-sheets of the boat, called out:

"Comrade, what craft is yours?"

"The Oquendo. And who are you?"

"Two officers and a boat's crew from the Maria Teresa," Hal boldly lied.

"You are very far from your ship, then," was the rather suspicious retort.

"I was about to ask you, comrade," went on Hal, "where the Maria Teresa is."

"It is queer that you do not know," came the answer.

Evidently the watch officer aboard the Spaniard was becoming more and more suspicious.

Hal was obliged to think and talk quickly.

"We have been away from the Maria Teresa since noon," he answered.

"She has not moved since, then."

"Ah! Then my captain was deceived,

for he told me he expected, by this evening, to move out nearer to the Oquendo. I supposed from that," went on Hal, lowering his voice as the boat drifted closer to the warship, "that we were to move out to-night and attack the Yankee fleet and their accursed transports."

"I have heard nothing of it," the Oquendo's watch officer called down over the vessel's side. "Carrajo! I wish it were true."

"So do I," rejoined Hal, and he spoke the truth this time, for he knew that all of Admiral Sampson's sailors would be hugely delighted to have the Spaniards sail out and attack them.

"I would advise you to get to your ship, comrade," resumed the Oquendo's officer. "If there is to be a fight to-night, you would not want to miss it."

"Not for worlds. So, comrade, the Maria Teresa is at the same anchorage?"

It is so. Close in, over there by the wharves."

I thank you, comrade," answered Hal, lifting his cap. Give way, men."

Away they sped, saved from disaster by sheer Yankee nerve.

They had gone several cable lengths before they encountered another motionless Spanish warship.

"Boat ahoy! Where from?" demanded the Spaniard.

"Shore boat from the Oquendo," replied Hal, in a hurry tone. "Important business."

"Any news for to-night, comrade?"

"Haven't heard of any," was Hal's quick-witted reply. "It is possible that I may have some when coming back from the shore."

"If so, God speed you, comrade."

Their passage now was unhindered. They had passed the outer boats, for which reason it did not occur to the deck

watches on the ships lying further in to ask awkward questions.

This rule worked until our young friends were passing the ship furthest in of all—the Maria Teresa.

"Boat ahoy!" came the sharp hail, as Hal steered by that cruiser.

"Ship ahoy!"

"From what vessel are you?"

"The Oquendo, comrade."

"Run alongside, and come aboard," was the order.

"Impossible, senor."

"Come aboard, or I will order you fired upon."

Here was a dilemma, indeed. Through the darkness our hero saw the figures of several marines appear at the rail.

"That fellow is in earnest," whispered Juan.

"He will have to fire, then," was Hal's reckless reply. "I am not going aboard."

"Let me go, then. I can patch up a story that will fool him."

"Do nothing of the sort," whispered Maynard; then called out boldly to the Maria Teresa's officer:

"You fire at your own risk, senor. You will have to settle, in that case, with my captain."

"Come aboard, or the marines will fire into you."

"Let them fire—still at your own risk, senor."

"For what purpose are you going ashore?"

"Had you been more civil, comrade, I might have told you. Give way, men."

Splash! went the oars. Ahead-shot the boat.

Hal fully expected to be fired upon. For all in the boat the next ten or fifteen seconds were full of suspense.

But they shot away from the Maria Teresa in safety, plunging forward to-

ward the lights that showed where the nearest wharf was.

Fortunately for them, the Teresa's officer had weakened in his threat of firing.

What a chance that young Spaniard had missed. What glory would have been his had he ordered the extermination of the boat's occupants! It would have been discovered that all eight were spies under the laws of nations and the rules of war.

Hal ran the boat alongside of one of the landing stages, next sprang nimbly up the steps to the wharf above.

"Halt, there!" came the sharp order.

A sergeant backed by six soldiers barred his path.

"A landing party from the Oquendo," said Hal, glibly.

He had become so accustomed to the lie that it rolled off his tongue.

"On official business?" questioned the sergeant, saluting as soon as he caught sight of Hal's uniform.

"On official business," replied the young spy.

"In that case, senor, I must call the lieutenant of the guard. You can explain the matter to him."

"There is a lieutenant of the guard here, then?"

"Certainly; how many times have you been ashore, senor, that you did not know that?"

"This is the first time that I have been ashore," replied Maynard.

"Ah! I understand now."

"Be good enough to hurry with calling the lieutenant, sergeant, if I must be kept waiting until he comes."

"There will be something more required, sergeant, than merely speaking with the lieutenant."

That little speech, delivered just before the sergeant hurried off, gave Hal an uncomfortable feeling.

BOB FERRET IS ONE OF NICK CARTER'S DEFTEST PUPILS.

It lasted for five minutes, during which he and Juan stood almost without stirring, curiously surveyed by the half-dozen soldiers who had intercepted them.

"Good-evening, senor," greeted the lieutenant, coming out upon the wharf at last, followed by the sergeant.

"Good-evening, lieutenant. Your guard has blocked me."

"It is their orders, senor, nor did I make those orders. They are from el senor commandante. You are a shore party?"

"Yes."

"From which ship?"

"The Oquendo."

"Your business?"

"We came ashore to seek some deserters from our ship."

"Deserters!" echoed the Spaniard.

"Can it be possible Spain has any sailors who would desert while the hated Yankees are outside waiting for us to give them battle?"

"So it seems," replied Hal, shrugging his shoulders. "We have lost five valuable men whom I am ordered to find and get aboard of the ship with as little delay as possible."

"Your pass?"

"Pass?" repeated Hal.

Here was a new stumbling block.

"Certainly, senor. It is not permitted to any officer from the fleet to land without a pass from his captain, countersigned by the admiral."

Hal thought he saw a way, now, out of the difficulty.

"My captain offered me a pass," he lied, "but I did not take it, for my captain said he did not believe the admiral could find time to countersign it."

"The admiral is very busy, then?" asked the lieutenant, sardonically.

"Very, my friend," replied Hal, with a confidential nod.

"How? His ships have not stirred in days."

"Who knows that they will not, to-night?" insinuated Hal, with a decidedly Spanish shrug of his shoulders.

"Ah!" cried the lieutenant. "You interest me."

"You will be more interested in the morning."

"There is to be a naval fight, then?" questioned the lieutenant, his eyes glowing with excitement.

"Now, you are asking me more than I can say," replied Hal, trying to look mysterious. "All I know is that there is great activity in the fleet to-night. The admiral was aboard of us two hours ago, and left in a hurry after a short consultation with our captain."

"There can be no doubt about it," put in Juan, gravely. "The Yankee fleet is to be attacked before daylight comes."

"Ah, now, that is good news!" cried the lieutenant. "Success to you, my friends."

"And yet you tell us that we cannot go on shore?"

"I will take the chances, my comrades, though you understand that it will be serious for me if I have made any mistake."

"You will make no mistake," said Hal, reassuringly, "unless you count it one to prevent me from finding five men, three of whom are among our best gunners."

"Senors, I take the chances," replied the lieutenant, bowing low. "Pass on."

But just as Hal and Juan were at the height of their elation a new difficulty assailed them.

It came from the lieutenant.

CHAPTER V.

IN BELEAGURED SANTIAGO.

"One moment, senors," interposed that Spanish officer.

It struck our hero that there was more suspicion in the enemy's tone.

"You said you were going ashore to seek deserters," suggested the lieutenant.

"That is the truth, my comrade."

"Then why do you leave your boat's crew in the boat?"

The Spaniard's voice rang with increasing suspicion.

"You do well to remind me that I am a stupid fellow," replied Hal, with a nervous laugh. "To tell the truth, comrade, my mind is so much taken up with the work to be done later on to-night that my mind is absent on matters of the moment."

"Ah!" said the lieutenant.

Neither Hal, nor Juan wanted to take their six Cubans on shore.

All were men who had served the cause zealously in this neighborhood.

There was far too much probability that some of the Spanish soldiers in the city would recognize them and denounce them.

Should this happen, the Cubans who were impersonating Spanish soldiers were sure to be shot.

In addition, Hal and Juan would be denounced by the same means. They were getting into Santiago, but, once their men were recognized our two young friends would be sure to find Santiago a place impossible to get out of.

But this was no time for hesitating.

At whatever risk, our hero was determined to get on shore.

Stepping to the edge of the wharf, he shouted down crossly:

"Tumble ashore, you rascals! Why did you not follow me in the first place?"

"Because you gave them no order to

that effect, probably," suggested the Spanish lieutenant, dryly.

Up came the six Cubans, as willing to take great risks as were Hal and Juan.

"Form by twos; follow me; forward!" ordered Maynard, gruffly.

Turning, as he marched away, he saluted the Spaniard who had so nicely, if unwittingly, helped them in their plans.

That young officer returned the salute, but, as soon as our hero's back was turned the Spaniard smiled his contempt for rattle-brained naval cadets who lost their heads over the prospect of battle.

"What shall we do with these fellows, Juan?" asked Hal, as he and his chum marched up the wharf ahead of their six.

"The safest thing, perhaps, mi amigo, is to leave them in some cafe, with strict orders to remain there until we come back for them."

"And you feel confident they will stay right there?"

"These men," spoke Juan, warmly, "have been fighting for Cuba for three years. They will obey any order that is given them, no matter what the cost."

"We will follow your plan, then. There is a cafe over there."

Hal halted his men at the door of the cafe, and went inside.

"Have you a private room here?" he asked of the proprietor.

"No, senor, but——"

"Enough, then."

At the second cafe along that waterfront street Maynard was rejoiced to find that the desired private room was a feature of the place.

"But there is a caballero, and two ladies with him," objected the proprietor.

"No matter," snapped Hal, curtly. "Turn them out. I require the room for the service of Spain."

"Senor, if it is not too urgent——"

JACK BURTON IS A PROMISING YOUNG DETECTIVE.

"You dog, if you dare to oppose another objection," cried the young spy, warningly, "I'll run you through the body!"

He drew his sword three or four inches out of the scabbard, but the proprietor, who now saw that it would cost him dearly to dispute with this irritable young officer, bowed down almost to the floor.

"Spare me, caballero," whined the fellow. "I am but too glad to obey any order which I receive in the name of Spain."

"Turn those people out, then. I shall come with my men, and expect to find the room cleared in sixty seconds."

Saying which, in his crispest manner, our hero turned on his heel and went back to the street.

Waiting what he judged to be a full minute, he gave the order:

"Forward!"

Wheeling his six disguised Cubans at the door, he marched them into the main room of the place.

As he entered, Hal caught a fleeting glimpse of skirts vanishing through the rear door of the place, while the proprietor, bowing in his most suave manner, stood at the door of the private room, exclaiming:

"Caballero, the poor apartment is at your disposal.

"There are but four chairs in there," grumbled Hal. "Place two more in there at once."

Quaking, the proprietor obeyed. Hal marched his six men in, seated them at the table and directed the owner to bring at once two bottles of wine.

That worthy departed after the wine, hiding a wry face from our hero. It was quite customary for Spanish officers to order wine, but by no means as usual for them to offer to pay for it.

But Hal proved a delightful exception in that respect by promptly handing over the price of the two bottles in Spanish money.

And, while the proprietor was absent, he had found opportunity to whisper his instructions in the ears of his men.

"Come on, comrade," said Maynard, thrusting his arm through his chums and leading him out of the room.

At their heels followed the subservient proprietor.

"Shut that door," whispered Hal, turning around upon the Spaniard, who promptly obeyed.

"Now, lock it."

"Eh, caballero?"

"Lock the door, I say."

"But those men of yours——"

"Blockhead!" roared the young American. "I see that I was wrong not to run you through the body at first."

"Do not be angry, caballero," pleaded the proprietor. "I will turn the key at once. See, it is done—though perhaps your men will break through and raise a riot here in my place."

"If they do," promised Hal, "I will see to it that they are strung up by the thumbs when I get them back to our ships. Now, see here, fellow, you must keep the men in that room. If they have got out by the time I come back, I will take pay for the outrage in drops of your blood."

"But, caballero," pleaded the poor wretch, now thoroughly frightened, "if they insist on breaking out, how can I stop them from doing it?"

"That is your lookout," retorted Maynard, turning upon his heel and leaving the fellow.

But that worthy proprietor followed our hero to the door, weakly protesting:

"I will do my best, caballero, even to

appeasing them by a present of an extra bottle or two."

"Do nothing of the kind, fool," hissed Hal, angrily. "We are seeking deserters from our ship now. If you help these men of mine to get drunk, of what use will they be to me, either here or on ship-board?"

"That is true, excellency."

"Therefore, do exactly what I have ordered of you—neither more nor less. And by way of precaution, give me your name and your street and number."

Hal wrote the required data, as given, in his notebook, saying dryly:

"If it turns out that you have not obliged me as you should, I shall know with whom I have to deal."

With that both he and Juan got clear of the cafe.

"Why did you lock the men up in that room?" whispered Juan.

"To keep up appearances."

"Why did you give such particular orders as to their detention?"

"For the same reason."

"Then it was not because you feared my countrymen would desert you?"

"Certainly not; and I gave them to understand as much in the instructions that I whispered to them."

"I am satisfied. And now?"

"And now," whispered Hal, gayly, gripping his stanch comrade's arm, "we will try to see all that is worth seeing in Santiago!"

Which they proceeded to do with the utmost dispatch.

But consternation would have struck them had they known that a sharp-eyed secret service man was following them wherever they went.

That detective of the enemy had got his clue of suspicion in the way peculiar to his class of ferrets.

CHAPTER VI.

THE POLICE SPY.

"Juan, my dear boy!"

"Well, mi amigo?"

"Have we seen everything?"

"Everything, I think."

"The city's forts, the camps, the disposition of the artillery, the location of the magazines, the depots of supply—even the hospitals. Is there anything else at which we should take a look?"

"Nothing that I can think of," replied Ramirez, thoughtfully.

"We have had a great night of it."

"We have learned everything that your General Shafter wanted to know, and some things he did not mention."

Both boys were in a highly exultant frame of mind.

They had gone everywhere, unquestioned and unchallenged since leaving the wharf.

At every point their uniforms of the naval service of Spain had apparently freed them from suspicion, and the fact that both spoke Spanish fluently had contributed to free them from suspicion.

They stood now in plain view on one of the most brilliantly lighted streets in Santiago.

Spanish people who passed by looked at them with admiration, for your Spaniard dearly loves the sight of a natty uniform, especially of one worn in the service of his own country.

"Shall we get back to the ship?" asked Juan.

Both boys were speaking in undertones that could not have been distinguished five feet away.

"I'm afraid we can't," returned Hal.

He spoke with apparent unconcern, but his watchful friend, Ramirez, was quick to note that something was wrong.

"What do you mean, mi amigo?" he queried, eagerly.

"THE LIVING TARGET" IS GREAT.

"Not much; merely that an attempt, just now, to march our men down to the wharf to embark would be to run into arrest."

"We have been followed?" whispered Ramirez.

"For some time, I believe; possibly ever since we left the wharf early in the evening."

"Diablo!" greeted the Cuban.

"Bad language won't help us, my dear fellow. Its a serious problem."

"If we have really been followed," went on Juan, uneasily, "we are almost certain to be in a Spanish dungeon before many minutes."

"Don't turn too quickly, but when you do get faced around, take a swift look at that fellow who is staring into the jeweller's window below us."

"I see him," whispered Juan, a few moments later.

"This is the fourth time I have seen him, in different parts of the city to-night."

"Diablo!" vented Juan, again. "If he is a police spy, and has really been trailing us, then there is no path out of Santiago to-night."

"It looks that way," admitted Hal, still speaking without emotion.

"Diablo! Can you, mi amigo, who know so much about the horrors of Spanish imprisonment, speak so coolly about it?"

"I am considering," replied Hal, slowly.

"Considering what?"

"How to best get the fellow off our track."

Juan shook his head incredulously.

"At the first sign of an effort to slip away, mi amigo, that fellow has only to raise a yell that will bring scores of Spanish soldiers down upon us. The rest is easy to predict—a night in a dungeon;

in the morning a fifteen second trial; hanged twenty minutes later."

"Yes, if we are caught."

"No matter for me, mi amigo, for I am a Cuban, and have always expected to die for our cause. But it is different with you. It is too bad that you, who have been so loyal both to Cuba and America, should die also."

Juan spoke with the utmost dejection. He, too, had sized up the man down the street as a police spy upon their track, and looked upon himself and his chum as being as good as dead already.

It was a tight fix, but at the same time it was just the kind of a predicament that always brought Lieutenant Hal Maynard out at his best.

"Juan, I have made a resolve."

"Yes," quivered Juan.

Always observant of his friend, the Cuban knew now that Maynard had hit upon some scheme by which he hoped to rid himself of their crafty pursuer.

By the grim compression of Hal's lips, he also knew that the American's plan was a desperate one—a quick, daring stroke such as had made Shafter's young aide famous on more than a dozen other occasions.

"Juan, I am going to have a row with this fellow."

Ramirez opened his eyes in some surprise.

"An out-and-out row, in which I shall call him all the names on my list."

The Cuban gasped.

"You will run us into the greatest trouble, mi amigo."

"Trouble," retorted Hal, "that will either rid us of this fellow's attentions, or hang us sure!"

"My life is in your hands," Juan quickly assured him.

"Perhaps, I had better tell you just what I mean to do——"

HAVE YOU BEEN INTRODUCED TO ROXY?

"No, no!" hastily protested the Cuban. "I would rely upon your brain and coolness where I would doubt my own. But I would urge you to make haste, mi amigo, for I can see that the fellow is scribbling something in a notebook—very much likely some information about us which he will despatch by a messenger who may pass him at any moment."

"Come along," whispered Hal, over his shoulder. "Keep at my back, as if to support me in what I do."

Juan followed nimbly, for Hal had stepped briskly away.

He met the supposed spy face to face.

"I am glad to have encountered you again," thundered Hal, laying a hand roughly upon the fellow's arm.

"Senor," growled the other, "be good enough to take your hand away."

"You dog," went on Hal, excitedly, "I have a good mind to choke you. For two nights I have been looking for you."

"For two nights?" stammered the stranger, wincing under Hal's powerful grip.

"Yes, for two nights—that is to say, ever since you insulted the lady who was with me at the casino."

"I—insulted—a lady with you—at the Casino two nights ago?" repeated the Spaniard, opening his eyes wider and wider.

"Yes; do not deny it."

"But I do deny it."

"Then you lie!" exclaimed Hal, hotly.

The few passers-by who were near enough to hear what was said thought they saw a young naval officer working himself up to the height of passion.

For that reason, these passers-by hurried on. Not one offered to take the part of the bulldozed civilian. Spanish officers are apt to have the best of it in streets fights in garrison towns.

"You have called me a liar," glared

the Spaniard, his dusky skin paling under the white heat of passion.

"And I am a man who stands by my word," retorted Hal, hotly. "Senor, while my sword belongs to Spain, that same sword would be dishonored did I not take pains to avenge the insult you offered to the senorita——"

But Hal suddenly checked himself, adding:

"Why should I give a dog like you the name of the lady. Doubtless you would consent to take a thrashing cheerily for the sake of learning the lady's name."

"Senor," cried the Spaniard, angrily, "you have offered me a second insult."

"I will bury you under them presently," sneered Hal. "When I remember that it was on account of the words of a dog like you that I endured the jibes of all my messmates on the Oquendo, I feel that nothing I can do to you will be severe enough."

"And I, senor," retorted the Spaniard, still at white heat, "shall not be idle while you are working your pleasure. Fortunately, I know something of the use of arms."

If the fellow had entertained any suspicions about Hal, our hero had evidently caused him to forget them.

But in causing the Spaniard to forget, he had also drawn upon himself a fight with the Spaniard.

The sound of arms would bring down the guard. Arrest would follow. Next—explanations. That thought made Ramirez shiver.

"I call you a dog, a liar, a dastard and an insulter of women," jeered the American.

"Lead the way senor."

"You are armed?" demanded Hal.

"No, but I perceive that your comrade

"NICK CARTER TO THE RESCUE," IS THE WATCHWORD.

has a sword. He will not be so unjust as to refuse me the use of it."

"By no means," responded Juan, who quickly guessed that this was the reply that Hal wanted him to make.

"Once more, senor, lead the way. You have insulted me so grossly that I am eager to prick your skin with your comrade's blade."

"I would lead the way," replied Hal, "except that I do not know this part of the city well enough to know where we can exchange a few thrusts without interference. Perhaps you can take me to such a place."

"Fortunately," replied the Spaniard, "I have the key of an unoccupied store near here. I will take you there."

"Now, decidedly," cried Hal, inwardly, "this rascal is a police agent, as I supposed. He is provided with keys of unoccupied buildings that he may have handy places to dodge into when he considers that his shadowing work is likely to be suspected by his victim."

"But there is one circumstance that will cause delay," hinted the Spaniard, just as he was about to start ahead to show the way.

"And that circumstance?" demanded Hal.

"I have no second in the affray that is to take place."

"You do not need one."

"Pardon me, senor, if I take the trouble to differ with you,"

Here was another predicament.

The introduction of any other stranger into the affair would defeat our hero's audacious plan.

But Juan came promptly to his chum's aide.

"Caballero," observed the Cuban, turning to the Spaniard, "why cannot I act as second to you both. I have no feeling in this affair. I will serve your

interests as well as I do those of my comrade."

"You give me your word for that?" asked the Spaniard.

"I promise you," pledged Juan, hypocritically, "by the reverence in which I hold my Spanish uniform."

"With that promise," responded the Spaniard, bowing gracefully, "I must be content, caballero."

"Then lead the way," snorted Hal, impatiently, "or I shall think of some new insults which you will richly deserve."

Though he paled a little under this vicious bantering, the Spanish retained his outward composure with a determination which convinced our hero that he was talking to a man of the world.

They followed their man around a corner, down a street for two squares, and at last halted before the door of a store which was deserted.

Fitting one of a bunch of keys to the lock of the door, the Spaniard admitted them.

"Faugh!" growled Hal, sniffing the musty air as they entered, "you are, as I half supposed, a mere merchant, and one who did not have cunning enough to make his business pay him. So this is the establishment in which you struggled in vain to make a living?"

But the Spaniard, as if determined not to allow himself to become too angry to fight well, did not reply.

Instead, he fumbled about until he found a lantern and lighted it.

"You will observe, senor," he said, pointing to the shutters, "that the windows are so well covered that there is no danger from prying eyes. Now, for your comrade's sword. You will pardon me, caballero," turning to Juan, "if I show a desire to inspect your blade before using it."

"Certainly," replied Juan, quietly, "and you are right."

He drew his sword and passed it, handle first, to the Spaniard.

"It is an excellent blade," replied the Spaniard, coolly, after an examination. "But, caballeros, you must pardon me for exacting one more condition. I know neither of you, though one of you has forced upon me a quarrel that must be fought out. I refuse to fight unless you both honor me with cards proclaiming your names and rank."

Neither Hal nor Juan had such a thing as a card about them.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CASINO "TIP."

But a little thing like that made no difference to Hal Maynard.

In fact, he had half foreseen this difficulty—had hoped for it.

"Senor," he retorted cuttingly, "if you are a man of sufficient importance to carry cards of your own, we will exchange."

Though the Spaniard flushed at the imputation that he did not carry cards of his own, he contrived to keep his temper.

Thrusting his hand into an inner pocket, he drew forth his pocketbook.

Next he walked over to the lantern, bending low to inspect the contents of the book.

Hal flashed a look at his chum. Juan comprehended, and sprang forward.

He caught the Spaniard off his guard, seized him by the throat, locked with him in tight, strangling embrace.

A husky cry came from the fellow's lips; that was the last sound before Juan's convulsive fingers shut off his breath altogether.

Realizing in a flash the full significance of the trap into which he had allowed

himself to be led, the Spaniard now made the fight of his life.

He was a wiry fellow. Undoubtedly he would have wrenched away long enough to shout loudly for help had not Hal been quick in coming to the rescue.

He attacked the Spaniard from behind, he and Juan dragging their victim to the floor.

Then ensued a more desperate struggle than before, but in the hands of two such determined youths there could be but one conclusion to it.

At the end of two minutes Spain's subject was lashed hand and foot so securely that hours of desperate struggling would not wrench him free.

In addition to that his silence was secured by a gag pushed into his mouth as far as it would go.

"There must be some cupboards here," whispered Hal, rising and picking up the lantern.

There was one less than twenty feet away, nor did it take them long to place their victim there.

"For safe-keeping," smiled Hal, dryly.

"Let us shut the door and hurry away," suggested Juan, for the whole scheme had been so daring and so swiftly carried out that the Cuban felt all but dazed.

"One moment, though," was Hal's return whisper. "You remember our suspicion?"

"That the knave was a police spy?"

"Exactly. Well, I am going to prove it, or disprove it. If we have made a mistake, I shall be sorry, but it will be decidedly too late to rectify it."

Hal passed his hand rapidly through the fellow's clothing.

"I am stupid," muttered the young American, an instant later. "He dropped his pocketbook out there, of course, when we assailed him."

NICK CARTER IS THE KING OF THEM ALL.

Out in the store they found the book, on the scene of the late struggle.

Almost the first object that they sighted in it was the card of a secret police agent.

"No mistake," announced Hal, contentedly. "Well, well, dear boy, if we had not done as we did, we might now be marching on our way to a Spanish dungeon. It is much better the way it is."

"Decidedly," assented Juan.

Extinguishing the lantern, they stole to the street closing the door behind them.

At the next corner they came upon a brilliantly lighted building.

"Do you see where we are?" asked Juan.

"Some public building."

"It is the Casino."

"Eh?"

"It is the pleasure resort of Santiago. At this moment the youngsters of the Spanish army and the beauties of the city are gathered there. Wine is being sipped. Dark eyes are looking love into other dark eyes. Brisk tongues are discussing in advance how badly the Yankee pigs are to be thrashed when they dare venture on shore."

"By Jove," muttered Hal, "you make my curiosity itch!"

"To see the pretty senoritas?"

"Confound it, no! To see the Spanish officers enjoying their victory in advance. To witness the enthusiastic confidence of the Spanish populace, who cannot realize that they are on the edge of a swift Waterloo. Such a spectacle will furnish us with good material to work into our report."

From where they stood they could see a few Spanish officers entering through the main door of the building.

There were other groups of vivacious-looking Spanish girls, in lace and man-

tillas, going in under the chaperonage of severe looking mammas.

Just then an orchestra struck up inside.

Juan, whose toes itched whenever dance music sounded, could not resist the melodious appeal.

"Diablo!" he muttered. "We must certainly go in and see what is going on there."

They entered, passing in the vestibule other officers, both of Spain's army and navy, who, after slight stares of curiosity, saluted courteously.

In the cafe wine was flowing. There was more of that, apparently than food, since there was much more of the former in evidence.

The Spanish girl of the better classes gets little chance for innocent flirtation. Wherever she goes, a prim duenna accompanies her. There were almost as many duennas as maidens in the Casino on this night.

Overhead of the cafe the ballroom was open. Here merry dancers were gliding over the floor to the strains of imaginative Spanish melodies.

Between music the young people chatted merrily. Army and navy men were the favorites. Civilians were compelled to give up the prettiest of the senoritas to the wearers of uniforms.

As Hal and Juan entered the ball-room—the two handsomest young officers on the floor—a flutter of curiosity passed through the fair contingent.

It quickly died out, however. No one present appeared to know them; introductions were impossible.

Both young spies moved calmly through the assemblage, maintaining a quiet reserve, but saluting either army or navy officers who glanced in their direction.

At the upper end of the ballroom our young friends found seats.

CRIMINALS OF ALL KINDS FEAR NICK CARTER.

"We'll sit here a little while," murmured Hal. "Perhaps we shall hear something."

Near them stood a group of young Spanish officers.

"For my part," remarked one of the young officers, "I do not think the Yankees will land their army at all."

"Then why have they come here?" asked another.

"They took us to be cowards like themselves, and thought that their mere arrival would frighten us into surrender."

"If our fleet could only get outside the harbor and annihilate the transports——"

"If it could!" broke in another, contemptuously. "Let it come to you from me, caballero, that our fleet can and will get out at the Yankees and sink them."

"It will be a glorious day for Spain if the Yankees are sunk!" cried another. "But who knows what the plans are?"

"There are two officers from one of our ships," broke in another army officer, nodding his head in the direction of Hal and Juan.

"Let us ask them if they have any news," and the whole group moved over to where the two young spies were seated.

"All I know," replied Hal, rising courteously when the question was put to him, "is that we have orders to be aboard by midnight."

"You think you will attack the Yankee fleet?"

"All I can say is that I hope so."

"You think the attack will be after midnight then?"

"I am pretty sure that there will be no attack before midnight."

"We thank you, caballeros," and the army officers moved away.

A few seconds later a Spanish colonel approached them.

"You were not communicative, senor," he smiled.

"We might have told them a little more, perhaps," admitted Hal, wondering what the colonel meant.

"You could have told them much more," laughed that officer, "since you are both officers who are to go with to-night's venture."

"You mean the attempt of the fleet to get out of the harbor?" queried Hal.

"Naturally I mean nothing of the sort, since the fleet will not leave our harbor to-night," retorted the colonel, a trifle stiffly.

"Then what are we to accompany?"

"So you are choosing to be secretive with me also," grumbled the Spanish colonel. "It is of no use, young men, since I happen to know that you are two of the young officers who are to go out on the torpedo boat. But we will not quarrel, for I wish the greatest success to you. May you blow up the best half of the Yankee fleet!"

"I see that you are well informed, colonel," answered Hal, saluting once more. "Well, senor, we wish ourselves success. But we must leave now, for it is time for us to report aboard the boat!"

"You have not more than a five minutes' walk from here," rejoined the colonel, more affably. "The Ojente wharf cannot be a greater distance than that from here."

"A torpedo boat going out to destroy the fleet!" quivered Hal in his comrades' ear as they passed out into the street. "And at the Ojente wharf. Juan, my boy, where is that place?"

"It will not be hard to find," replied the Cuban, quietly, "since that is the very wharf at which we left our boat."

"I remember where to find that. Juan, my boy, where is that place?"

"It will not be hard to find," replied

the Cuban, quietly, "since that is the very wharf at which we left our boat."

"I remember where to find that. Juan, we've got to hurry."

Less than four minutes later they descended upon the pier, passing, as it happened, the lieutenant of the guard who had permitted them to land.

"You have found your deserters, caballeros?" he inquired.

"Not a one of them," reported Hal, with apparent dejection.

"Yet you have searched well?"

"Depend upon it that we have left no part of the city unexplored."

"It is unfortunate, caballeros," replied the lieutenant. "But the six sailors you brought ashore with you? You have not lost them as well?"

His tone was half bantering, but Hal, frowning, replied:

"Decidedly not. We left them under lock and key until they were needed. My comrade is about to return and get them."

Taking his cue Juan returned with all haste to the cafe, nor was it long before he returned with the six Cubans.

"Let them get into the boat at once," whispered Hal.

"You are going to hurry back to the fleet?"

"Not just yet. Not until," was Maynard's rather ambiguous answer, "I have attended to that torpedo boat."

CHAPTER VIII.

ABOARD THE TORPEDO BOAT.

"The torpedo boat?" breathed Ramirez, tremulously.

"Certainly. Do you not see it at the end of the wharf?"

"I noted it some moments ago. But what—"

"What am I going to do to it?" broke in Hal, energetically. "My dear fellow, I don't know. But I've simply got to do something."

Juan looked utterly astonished. He had the greatest faith in his comrade, and had known him to do things that were little less than wonderful.

But to prevent the torpedo boat from getting out that night? How could such

a seemingly impossible task be accomplished?

Moreover, Hal had just admitted that he had no definite plan.

At the end of the wharf the little torpedo craft presented a scene of great bustle.

Steam was being gotten up at a great rate. Smoke was pouring from her funnels in the effort to get on as full a head of steam as possible, for when the little craft should put out on her secret, dangerous quest it was important that no clouds of smoke should then pass up from her funnels to give an added clue to her presence in the night.

Soldiers and sailors were carrying aboard cases.

It did not require keen perception to understand that each of these long wooden boxes contained a torpedo that was meant to do to the death some Yankee man-of-war or troopship.

Hal found himself clinching his hands as he stood looking on from a distance.

"That death-dealer shall not get outside to-night!" he muttered determinedly.

But how was he to prevent the sailing of the deadly craft?

Even now he had no plan. While trusting to luck to favor him he did not leave it all to luck, but did hard thinking every moment of the time he stood there.

Finally, though with his mind no better made up than before, he turned and nodded to Juan to follow him.

"You have formed some scheme, mi amigo?"

"Not yet. So far I have only resolved to go aboard of the boat."

"And if you are not permitted?"

"I shall get aboard somehow," whispered vindictive Hal. "There can be no such word as defeat now!"

They were almost at the gang-plank now. An officer stood there who surveyed them keenly.

"Good-evening, comrade," hailed Hal, raising his hat courteously.

"Good-evening, caballero."

"We are seeking five deserters from our ship, with urgent orders to find them, since they are needed to-night."

"I am sorry for your predicament, senor, but you will not find them aboard

this craft. I know personally every sailor who will serve under me to-night."

"I thank you for that assurance," rejoined Maynard, pleasantly. "Nevertheless, I am in for a bad hour with my commander if I return to the ship and tell him that there was a single place that I did not explore. For that reason alone, comrade, would you think me impertinent if I were to ask the privilege of going aboard to look the crew over?"

"Not impertinent in the least, but I will save you that trouble, caballero. I have so few men in my crew that I can summon them all here in less than a minute. You can look them over at once."

The officer turned as if to give the order, but Hal quickly broke in:

"That is not necessary, comrade. I should not easily forgive myself if I gave you so much trouble. Permit my comrade and myself to go aboard."

"If you insist upon it," replied the Spanish officer, stepping aside.

"Diablo!" inwardly murmured Juan, as he followed his chum down the gang-plank. "This thing that they call 'American cheek' is the best thing in the world for such work!"

As they stepped aboard, they noticed two young Spanish officers leaning over the further rail.

"You see them?" asked Hal, in an undertone.

"Yes?"

"Do you notice anything about them?"

"Only that they are young officers."

"But really, Juan, they slightly resemble us, and they belong to this craft. Now we know for whom the colonel mistook us. It is to these young men, therefore, that we owe the great tip that——"

But Hal broke off, for they were now too close to the officers whom they were discussing.

As they passed, our friends lifted their hats, receiving the same salute in acknowledgment.

"Come below quickly," whispered Hal, darting down one of the companionways.

They brought up in a narrow passageway. Before they had gone a dozen feet Hal halted with a thrill of delight.

Juan, just behind him, peered over his shoulder.

They were looking into the diminutive engine-room of the craft.

It was deserted for the moment. On a seat opposite the engine's levers lay a wrench and several other tools.

"Heaven favors a hustler!" whispered Hal. "Juan, dear boy, watch out sharp. The instant you see any one coming, begin to whistle 'La Paloma.'"

Saying which, without once looking back, Hal dove into the engine-room.

Juan saw him snatch up the wrench. The Cuban would have liked to see more, but on him fell the important work of keeping lookout.

He heard Hal moving about, heard the scrape of the wrench against machinery.

Then a whisper:

"All clear, Juan?"

"All clear, mi amigo!"

More slight noises came from the engine-room before the next hail.

"Still clear?"

"Still clear!"

Hal moved about rapidly once more, though he made very little noise about his work.

Suddenly on his acute hearing sounded the soft whistling of "La Paloma."

Like a flash, Hal was out of the engine-room, standing beside Juan in the passage.

Hardly had he got there when there came down the companionway a Spaniard whom they knew by his uniform to be an engineer officer.

He looked at the pair curiously as he neared them, but Hal and Juan were ready with raised hats.

"Senor," began Maynard, "we have just been looking in at your engine and admiring it. It is a beauty."

"Ah!" was the flattered response. "Then you have been engineers at one time or another?"

"No," was Hal's answer. "But we know enough about machinery to know a perfect, well-kept engine when we see one. I must congratulate you."

"I thank you, senor, though I am confident that I do not merit your praise."

"To our next meeting, senor," fin-

ished Hal, who was now anxious to get away.

Turning, he and Juan made their way up on deck.

Hal in the lead, they reached the gang-plank. The commander of the craft was still standing there.

"You are satisfied, senors?" he asked.

"Satisfied that we shall not find our men to-night," admitted Hal. "For ourselves, we must get back to our ship as quickly as possible."

"You have not told me what your ship is, senors."

"The Oquendo."

"Ah, so! Your captain is an intimate friend of mine. And your first lieutenant—I have forgotten his name."

Here was another unexpected poser. Should this officer discover that neither of these young men knew the name of the Oquendo's first lieutenant, either, there was sure to be an explosion.

"Our first lieutenant," said Maynard, speaking as rapidly as he could, "is now on the sick list. We must hurry now, senior; but we thank you for your great kindness."

"It was nothing," protested the Spaniard, and, before he could say more, the two young spies were walking rapidly along the wharf.

"That was a close squeak," muttered Hal, in Juan's ear.

"I thought we were done for when he asked the name of that infernal lieutenant."

They tumbled down and into their boat as quickly as they could.

"Give way!" ordered Maynard.

Then, as the boat shot out past the end of the pier, he leaned over and whispered triumphantly in his comrade's ear:

"That torpedo boat will not put out to-night! When they start the machinery something will happen."

"You were swift, then," thrilled Juan.

"It is easy to do mischief in two minutes that cannot be repaired in hours."

"If we can now get out safely past the Spanish fleet——" went on Ramirez.

"We have succeeded so well so far to-night that I do not see how we are likely to have any further trouble, unless——"

But Hal broke off abruptly. Though

they were already out of sight of the wharf through the haze, they could hear distinctly the sounds that the breeze brought to them.

"They are trying to start the torpedo boat," declared Hal. "Do you hear the hissing of steam?"

"Yes."

Crash!

"That was a smash in the machinery! The blamed engine is disabled!"

"It must be!" cried Juan. "Listen. From the shouting at the wharf there must be great confusion and consternation."

"Pull faster, men!" ordered Hal, excitedly. "Every yard counts now!"

Like heroes the six Cubans bent to their work at the oars. The boat fairly shot through the water.

But faster than any craft could travel came the dull gleam of a flash light through the haze.

"They are signaling!" quivered Hal.

"Signaling?" echoed Ramirez.

"Yes; signaling ahead to the fleet to be on the lookout for us."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE TEMPEST OF DEATH.

"They already trace the disaster to us!" cried Juan.

"The Spaniards would surely be dummies if they didn't."

"Pull faster—faster yet," urged Juan, bending forward to address the rowers.

"The signal is evidently understood ahead," breathed Hal, peering through the gloom.

Lights were flashing about in a way that suggested a miniature play of lighting.

Suddenly just ahead of the boys there loomed up the indistinct gray hull of a warship.

"Boat ahoy, there!" sang out a peremptory voice.

"Ship ahoy!" answered Hal.

"Row in close under our rail. We want to inspect you."

"Can't do it," bluffed Hal. "Our orders are urgent."

"Come under our rail. Refuse at your peril!"

"ALLEE SAME, BULLEE NICK CARTER!"

But Hal made a sign to his rowers to keep on, and, standing up in the stern-sheets, roared back:

"Blockhead! Can't you see that we are on a pursuit?"

"For the last time, head about and come under our rail."

"We have our orders from a higher source than you," came defiantly from our hero.

Flash! The night was illuminated by a jet of flame that shot from the mouth of a cannon. The air shook with the jar of the crash that came right on the heels of that flash.

The shot struck the water not two yards astern of the small boat.

"Bluffs don't work with that fellow!" gritted Hal through his tightly set teeth.

Bang! The second shot struck the water just ahead of the boat.

"At this rate," grumbled Juan, "they'll soon have our range. Even a Spaniard ought to hit at this distance."

Juan said no more, but his set face showed how thoroughly he appreciated the danger of their position.

Br-r-r-r-r-r! A machine gun's sharp, rattling fire grated on their ears just as the projectiles splashed the water all about them.

"We can't live a half minute under this," palpitated Hal, inwardly. "The poorest marksmen in the world can annihilate us under such a fire as this."

But he urged his men forward all the same. They needed little urging, for that matter, but bent to their oars with all the strength and wind that was in them.

Zip! One of the balls tore through the gunwale of the boat. Zip! Another made a neat round hole in the shell of the craft.

"Might as well shoot us as sink us," vented Hal.

The rattle of the machine gun continued, but suddenly the boat shot out of and beyond the range like a train leaving a tunnel.

Nor was the reason hard to understand, for they had passed out of the limited radius of the searchlight in that haze which was more than half fog.

"Was any one hurt?" called Hal, leaning forward.

There was no response.

"Keep on pulling your best, then, Stroke, set the fastest pace you can!"

For a couple of minutes they continued to skim through the water.

Then a faint voice came from the second man from the bow.

"Senor, I am weak."

"Weak?" repeated Hal.

"From loss of blood, senor, I think. I was struck in the shoulder."

"By that Gatling fire?"

"Si, senor."

"Why did you not tell me when I asked?"

"Senor, I have served the cause for there years, and did not want to play the baby now."

"I will take your place," cried Juan, rising and making his way swiftly forward. "Shall I order the wounded man astern?"

"Better not," advised Hal. "Most of the shots fired at us to-night are likely to come over the stern. A man who has been hit once doesn't want to get hit again."

Therefore, while Juan picked up the oar and made it move with a will, the wounded Cuban took out a handkerchief and proceeded calmly to bind the wound.

"We shall be up with another ship very soon, mi amigo," Juan softly called back.

"I know it, my dear boy," went Hal's answer. "If she has not changed her position, I know just about where she is. I am steering to give her as wide a berth as possible."

Hardly had our hero spoken when a flash of light and a loud report came simultaneously from the port quarter, right in the trail of a flash from a searchlight.

Whew—ew—ew—ew—ew! shrieked the shell over their heads, causing every one in the boat to involuntarily dodge.

"They're becoming more business-like every time," grimaced Hal, as he quickly sat erect again and peered ahead.

But that shell was the only heavy piece of ammunition sent after them from that ship, although half a dozen excited marines sprang to the rail and discharged their pieces without aim.

EVERYONE, EXCEPT CRIMINALS, LIKE NICK CARTER.

No one in the boat was hit this time. The Cuban who had been wounded by the machine gun fire had his wound already bandaged and was now fingering a cigarette which Juan forbade him to try to light until they were safe out of danger.

"They haven't done us much damage yet," said Hal, in a low tone to his men, and added, to himself:

"But a half an hour more of this work will wear out the strongest set of nerves to be found."

"Boat ahoy!" came the hail, as another large hull loomed up almost dead ahead.

It made Hal jump. He had not figured on finding another of the enemy so close at hand.

"Ship ahoy!" he answered, quickly. "Have you seen four men row by in a boat? We are in pursuit of them, with urgent orders to overtake them."

"Haven't seen them," was the answer from the deck, and they got safely by that vessel on the easiest kind of a bluff.

But the commander of the next ship was more on the alert.

He hailed the spy boat, waited ten seconds, and then fired two four-inch shells at the boat at point-blank range.

One just zipped the bow of the boat; the other fell three yards astern.

Then the boat was out of sight through the haze.

"How much more of this sort of thing?" sighed the stroke oar.

"Unless I am mistaken," answered Hal, "we have only the Oquendo left to pass."

"Give her a wide berth, mi amigo," advised Juan, softly.

"As wide as I can, you bet!"

Hal steered as close as he dared to the east side of the harbor, calculating on passing two hundred yards away from the Oquendo.

At that distance he hoped that the searchlight would not pierce the haze sufficiently to betray the whereabouts of the boatload.

"Diablo!" suddenly roared Juan from the bow. "They have a string of small boats spread out to stop us!"

"Jupiter!" quoth Hal, springing to his

feet to look ahead. "The best thing they could do, but the worst for us. Steady, boys, and you will see something happen."

The words were spoken so low that no one outside of the boat could hear them.

"Halt!" came the sharp hail fifty yards ahead.

"We are in pursuit of escaping rascals, senior," called Hal.

"That won't go down with us. Halt, or we fire into you!"

"We will come alongside, comrade, and let you inspect us," proposed Hal.

"Come alongside," was the mocking retort, "and we will take you to the Oquendo for a looking over."

Hal steered so as to run up alongside the enemy's boat, in which were an officer and a dozen sailors waiting for them.

"Throw us a line and we'll make it fast in the bow and let you tow us in."

"You impertinent rascal," came the stormy response, "what do you take us for? Row in to the Oquendo beside us."

"All right, senior. We strive to please!"

Hal ran the boat up close to the other. Some of the Spanish soldiers, plainly believing they were to be boarded, picked up their weapons.

Veer! Changing his course suddenly by almost eight points, young Maynard ran his craft crashing into the enemy.

"Back water!" roared the young strategist.

It was high time to do so. His own craft almost keeled over from the shock, but he had succeeded in his design, for the enemy's boat was floating bottom up, while the water was black with bobbing heads.

"Fire into the miserable scoundrels!" sputtered the officer of the boat which had met with misfortune.

There were two boats fairly near, and racing to overtake the audacious young American.

From the nearer of the boats the four men in the bow opened fire with their repeating rifles.

Bullets whizzed past our hero's head. The enemy's line of fire was right, but the fire itself was too high.

Crack! crack! rang Hal's revolver, until he had emptied the six chambers.

The enemy was silenced, for three of the men in the other boat were put out of the fight.

For rapid work in the night Hal's marksmanship was superb. No hand less steady could have worked such havoc.

"Watch out for that other boat!" called Juan.

Hal's attention had been temporarily diverted from the other lot of enemies. Now he turned upon them, drawing his second revolver.

"Keep off unless you want to get killed!" he jeered.

Naturally, that warning did not deter the Spaniards.

Hal waited until he got an indistinct glimpse of rifles being leveled by the pursuers.

Then, with rapid shots he emptied his second pistol into the boat. Back over the water came a chorus of wails.

Maynard was now beyond the line of boats, but far from being out of danger.

Boom! rang a gun of heavy calibre.

Morro Castle had opened upon them.

CHAPTER X.

REMEMBERING THE MAINE.

"We're up against it—sure!" vented Hal.

"The worst yet," admitted Juan.

Following the first discharge came a half a dozen others.

Old Morro had them at short range.

Two of the shots struck close enough to send miniature water spouts dashing over the eight men in the boat.

"They can't miss us now," gritted Hal, as a searchlight located on the grim old castle's walls sent its bright rays down upon them.

But only a few moments did the light glow when it went abruptly out, followed by the crash of a gun near the outer entrance to the harbor.

"Good!" thrilled Hal, standing up in his joy. "Row, men, and hope for a way out of this fix. One of our own vessels is firing upon Morro!"

From the excitable Cubans a yell went up.

Morro ceased firing upon the boat, for

now it had other trouble to contend with.

First one American vessel, and finally three, poured in their hot fire.

Morro forgot all about the small boat.

"Ten minutes and we are out of this!" roared Hal at the top of his voice, in order to be heard above the thunder of bombardment.

In five minutes they had covered half the distance to the bombarding Americans.

"Something coming ahead, senior," called out the Cuban in the bow.

"Can you make it out?" called Hal, peering.

But our hero, keen-eyed at night as any American in the army, was first to discern the approaching object.

It was a small craft without lights, moving at a great rate of speed.

"One of our own torpedo boats, I believe," he thrilled, steering toward the craft.

They were in the thick of the fire, now, with shells dropping all around them.

"Torpedo boat, ahoy!" hailed Hal Maynard, making a speaking trumpet of his hands.

"Is that Lieutenant Maynard?" came an answering hail from the bow of the boat.

"Right here, sir!"

"Good! We were looking for you."

"You've found us."

Describing a graceful turn in the water, the torpedo boat ran alongside within two feet of the port rail of Hal's boat, in such a way as to shield them from Morro's fire.

"Maynard?" called a voice.

"Here," answered Hal, standing up in the stern.

As the two craft drifted close together, a friendly hand reached down over the rail, as a voice exclaimed:

"Put it there, old man."

"Ensign Gilroy?" cried Hal, delighted.

"The same, old man. Late of the Racer. Had the pleasure of bringing you off from Havana on your last spying trip. Come aboard."

And Gilroy's muscular arm fairly hauled our hero over the rail and on to the torpedo boat's deck.

NICK CARTER'S BOYS ARE DEVOTED TO HIM.

"By Jove, I'm glad to see you," exclaimed Hal. "I was actually getting nervous under such fire as we've been in a small boat. But I've a friend with me whom you'll be glad to see."

"Ramirez?"

"The same."

"Gad! I will be glad to see him," assented Gilroy. "Where is he?"

"Second man from the bow."

Gilroy ran forward to assist the young Cuban captain on board.

The other six Cubans found their way aboard all right.

In a twinkling the small boat was towed astern. Turning her prow, the little craft raced out of the harbor that had proved too hot for the young spies.

Five minutes later the bombardment ceased altogether, the American warships steaming out to resume their close blockade.

"Was all that fuss made over us?" smiled Hal.

"Well, you might call it that," replied Gilroy. "General Shafter was mighty anxious about you, I guess, for he had a long talk with Admiral Sampson, and it was arranged between them just what to do to see that you got safely out of the harbor. But how did you succeed, old man? Find out plenty?"

"I am satisfied," smiled Hal. "I hope the general will be."

"If you brought out any such budget of news as you did from Havana, old man, the general can't very well help being pleased."

"I think I have at least as complete information," declared Maynard.

"One question, old man, if it's a fair one."

"Go ahead."

"Do you think we're going to have an easy nut to crack here at Santiago?"

Hal shook his head.

"Spaniards too many for us?" queried Gilroy.

"Not too many for us," spoke up Hal. "But there are enough of them to give us quite some trouble. To the best of the news I could gather there are from forty to forty-five thousand Spanish soldiers right in and around the city."

"Whew!"

"While General Shafter has about fifteen thousand."

"Whew, again!" remarked Gilroy, dryly.

"But our men are Americans," spoke Hal, proudly.

"Oh, there isn't a doubt that we'll win," predicted Gilroy, cheerfully.

"We'll have the navy's help, of course," admitted our hero.

"Oh, we'll have Santiago all right," declared Gilroy. "The Spaniards don't live who can keep us from taking any town we want. But in what condition are your soldiers?"

"Fine, despite the roughness of life on board of troop ships."

All three of the young men stood forward while this conversation was going on.

All the while, they were steaming rapidly, leaving the harbor behind and steaming eastward up the coast.

"There's the Seguranca," announced Gilroy, pointing to a vessel that was but barely visible through the darkness.

"Your eyes are better than mine," replied Hal. "Or are you merely guessing?"

"No guess-work about it, old man. Seguranca has a blue light out at the foremasthead, on purpose for us to be able to tell where to take you. I tell you, old chap, it isn't every lieutenant in the army who has four war vessels sent in to help him along, and who has special signals burned in his honor."

Traveling at such speed as the torpedo boat was able to make it was not many minutes before she lay alongside of the general's flagship.

"Report to the general at once, sir," was the message delivered by an orderly the instant that Hal clambered over the rail.

"Is Captain Ramirez included in that order?"

"Yes, sir."

Both young men entered the general's cabin.

They found him waiting, and primed with questions—questions which the two young spies were able to answer with an accuracy that delighted the commander of the Fifth Army Corps.

It was almost daylight when the conference was over.

It was a beautiful sight that the morning of the 22d witnessed.

Shortly after daylight the huge transport fleet got under way steering eastward toward several low hills named Los Altares, or the Altars, owing to their peculiar formation.

It was a little to the eastward of these rocky hills that General Shafter, depending largely on Hal Maynard's information, had decided upon landing the American forces.

The fleet was accompanied by several naval vessels, for it was expected that the Spaniards would make a determined resistance to the landing of the hated Yankees.

Away up at the head of the fleet steamed the *Seguranca*, by right of her being flagship.

On the bridge, close beside the captain of the vessel, stood General Shafter, closely scanning every foot of shore on either side of the little bay.

Near him, on the bridge and down under it, were grouped the officers of his staff.

Hardly one in all the group but held a pair of field-glasses to his eyes. Ashore, much of the village was burning.

In especial, the enemy had already set fire to several machine shops and the yard of the railroad running out to the mines.

Three or four small blockhouses or "fortinas" were visible from the deck of the flagship.

From these it would be possible for small detachments of the enemy's infantry, provided with repeating rifles, to pour down upon the beach a galling fire that would effectively prevent the landing of troops from small boats.

"The whole coast, sir, is lined with Spanish rifle-pits," reported Hal.

Several of the officers looked, but could see nothing.

"The Spanish rifle trenches are not visible unless you get close upon them," resumed Hal. "That is, not visible except to one who has been used to seeing them. The Spaniards have the tops of their trenches level with the top of the

ground, and the dirt dug out of the trenches is carried back to some hollow."

General Shafter continued to survey the shore anxiously. It was good generalship to land his forces without the loss of a man.

To lose several hundred men in the mere act of landing would be apt to prove discouraging to the bravest men alive.

"General," murmured Hal, in a low voice, moving toward the commander, "will you permit me to go ashore with a small reconnoitring party?"

"How many men?" asked Shafter, eyeing the boy, keenly.

"Not more than a dozen, sir."

"Where do you want to land?"

"Over there, sir"—pointing to the west end of the bay. "It looks to me as if there is a rifle trench there capable of sheltering at least two hundred of the enemy. At that rate, sir, they could pour down on us from six to eight thousand bullets a minute."

"How long would your dozen men last, Maynard?"

"We may not last ten seconds, sir, but we can find out for you whether the enemy is there."

"And you volunteer for that duty?"

"As for myself, sir," rejoined Hal earnestly, "I beg to be allowed to do it."

"You have already done so much for the American cause, Maynard, that it seems wicked for me to allow you to go into sure death."

But Hal's eyes flashed as he retorted:

"General, if I have really done anything in the past, then I ask as a reward, sir, to be permitted to head the first landing party."

General Shafter's eyes snapped with approval of this manifestation of soldierly spirit.

"The right is yours, Maynard. If you can find a sergeant and twelve men who will volunteer, go."

Volunteers? The entire regiment was ready to volunteer! This caused the general's eyes to snap again, for, a few years back when he was a colonel, the First Infantry had been his command.

Hal was obliged to select his men. Not one of those left behind could conceal his disappointment.

NICK CARTER IS AT THE HEAD OF ALL DETECTIVES.

In the meantime the captain of the Seguranca had caused one of the boats to be lowered over the side.

Boom! Away up on one of the hills a concealed Spanish field battery section of two pieces opened fire upon the Seguranca.

Plash! The Seguranca's boat struck the water, and was quickly towed to the side companionway, down which our hero ran.

First man in the first boat! To Lieutenant Hal Maynard fell the honor of being first to land in Cuba!

The volunteers and men to handle the boat were quickly down and in their places.

The two Spanish field guns up on the hill continued to discharge as rapidly as they could be served, shells dropping all around the Seguranca, but never one striking anything but water.

Then, of a sudden a new note struck upon the air. Uncle Sam's naval vessels thundered broadsides into the hills and along the shore.

Shells struck everywhere, exploding with terrific din.

"The enemy are running, boys!" cried Hal, as his boat neared the shore through the smoke. "The Spaniards are doing a fast two-step to the tune of 'Remember the Maine.'"

An enthusiastic yell greeted this announcement. It was answered from the fleet, where the army thronged the decks and rigging of the transports.

Plunge went the boat through the surf. Hal was first out upon the beach, leading his little squad up the slope.

"Intervals of three yards, boys!" sang out the young lieutenant. "Fire at the first pop!"

The shelling, however, had done its work. Hal and his men reached the first line of rifle trench only in time to see the backs of running Spaniards headed for the hills.

"Give them a volley, anyway, for luck!" cried Maynard.

Thirteen guns rang out, each speaking five times.

Several of the enemy were seen to drop, but the Americans did not pursue.

Standing on the crest of the rifle trench, Lieutenant Hal signaled back to the Seguranca that the landing was safe.

The fifteen minutes' bombardment ceased. A host of small boats now dotted the little bay, each boat bringing ashore loads of Uncle Sam's fighting men.

The work of remembering the Maine in Cuba had begun!

[THE END.]

The same graphic pen of an eye-witness will describe the first fighting done in Cuba by the American army. In No. 13 of The Starry Flag Weekly, out next week, will be published complete a superb story entitled, "Shafter's Right Hand; or, Hal Maynard's Great Game of Strategy." The author, Mr. Douglas Wells, is an old fighter himself. He is writing the best stories of our war with Spain that are being printed. Do not miss "Shafter's Right Hand;" if you want to know just what is happening in Cuba!

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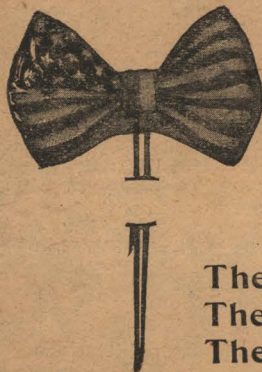
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